

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### Brace Point Railings

#### Washington Manufacturing Services

#### Brace Point Railings Trains Employees To Stimulate Continuous Improvements

##### Client Profile:

Brace Point Railings is a major supplier and installer of handrails and guardrails. Founded in 1992 and located in Seattle, Washington, the company specializes in manufacturing and installing corrosion-resistant railings for residential, commercial, and public works projects, and also manufactures and installs aluminum Juliet® balconies. Brace Point Railings currently employs 11 people.

##### Situation:

Brace Point Railings lost money in 2001 and continued losing money in the first quarter of 2002, mostly due to lack of sufficient training and workplace organization. In January 2002, the company employed 29 people. Layoffs and attrition reduced employment levels to 11. Without training, the company expected to shrink its workforce still further. Brace Point Railings had the technical knowledge to perform well in the marketplace, but did not have the internal expertise to effectively teach these skills to members of the organization. Consequently, the company's sales volume and reputation suffered. With proper training, Brace Point Railings could attract a stable volume of business, employ more people at higher wages, and achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. Thus, the need to develop processes and create structure was crucial to the success of the company and its employees. The company asked Washington Manufacturing Services (WMS), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

##### Solution:

After reviewing the project requirements, WMS teamed with South Seattle Community College (SSCC) to provide Washington State Job Skills Program funding for the project. With financing secured, WMS and SSCC worked together to provide the requisite training.

All Brace Point Railings shop, field, and office personnel were trained in workplace organization principles, which target efficiency and productivity improvements. Eleven employees received computer training to help improve communications, order processing, and cash flow. Six additional office personnel received project management training, which taught them how to improve on-time delivery and customer satisfaction. Five employees received blueprint reading training, and were tasked with targeting reductions in rework and delays. Finally, five office personnel received ISO 9001:2000 training;

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they will work to develop standardized training and work procedures to guarantee consistent quality and further improve customer satisfaction. After Brace Point Railings applied the principles of 5S (sweep, sort, simplify, standardize, and sustain), the offices, shop, and trucks are much better organized, cleaner, and safer. Computer training has given solid baseline skills to all employees, and more advanced users have received specialized instruction. Project management training has helped employees clarify procedures and identify areas for improvement, and provided structure for the project management team. Understanding ISO standards has become an excellent way of not only managing the quality system, but also managing the business as a whole.

As a result, the company has stabilized financially, stopping its downward spiral of the previous 18 months. Regular monthly profitability is expected from June 2003 onward.

### **Results:**

Trained all 11 employees.

Stabilized financial position.

Increased productivity and throughput, up from 150 percent to 375 percent, depending on the product.

Improved product quality by nearly 50 percent.

Reduced annual turnover from over 70 percent to almost zero.

Increased lead generation via ISO compliance marketing.

Expecting revenue to increase by 30 percent through 2003.

Forecasting revenue growth of 25 to 35 percent in 2004.

### **Testimonial:**

“Working with South Seattle Community College and Washington Manufacturing Services (WMS), we have implemented ISO compliance within a very short timeframe. With accelerated training in lean manufacturing and workplace organization, Brace Point Railings made excellent use of a slow period of activity to dramatically change the look of the company, both physically and functionally. The training opened our eyes to how good this company could be and started us on a continuous improvement journey.”

Marty Lyons, President